Bridgeford

MAY 5, 2002 Subject Apple Dryers & Orchards
history of Carl Lee Showalter and Ernest "Top" Showalter &
their huge contributions to the apple industry & their fellow
Orchardists, growing and drying experience.
in Sebastopol, California circa 1920 thru 1973

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To:
Historical Sebastopol, California 95472

I am attaching items of interest to the History of apple growing and apple drying in Sebastopol, Sonoma County, California.

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ERNEST LESTER SHOWALTER (TOPPY) (TOP) IN SEBASTOPOL
Native Son and extensive contributor to Apple Dryers and Orchards
b. on Watertrough Rd, Sebastopol 3-18-1915
dec Grass Valley, California 3-1-1990

Parents: May Laverne Walker b. Wheeler St, Santa Rosa, Ca
Carl Lee Showalter b. Kingman, Kansas Both buried Pleasant Hill Cemetery on Pleasant Hill Road, Sebastopol, Ca in the old Cemetery part.

Maternal Grandparent: Ida (Lake Co) Walker and Gus Walker

Paternal Grandparents: Perry Lewis Showalter (buried Odfellows Cem in Santa Rosa, Ca)
Harriet Hart Jenks Showalter (d. Richmond, Calif)
Harriet had one brother Edward Hart Jenks of Omaha, Neb. Church Pastor

Harriet Hart Jenks Showalter is direct descendant of John Hart, who signed the Declaration of Independence for New Jersey (last signature to appear).
She also is found in "The Jenks Family in America", a book, and a small issue of "The Jenks Family in England". (A Jenks was the first Governor of Massachussets and was 7' 2" tall!)

Perry Lewis Showalter brought his family to California.
He brought seven children by 2 wives, 3 & then four, and they settled around Sebastopol and Santa Rosa, California - being Asa, Oscar & Ina by Caroline Center Showalter of Illinois. And Ruth Carl, Ernest and Perry by Hattie Hart Jenks Showalter.

Ina Showalter married Johnny Johnson, and they acquired a drayage business in Sebastopol on Burnett Street & Main St. She and Johnny operated it until Johnny's death, and Benepe Drayage (?) Company acquired it - all prior to Wetch Bros Insurance acquiring the building. Front Entrance I believe was on Main, and the drayage (horse drawn wagons) used the Burnett St entrance. They lived on Bodega Avenue just East of the experimental Burbank Gardens, and owned other lots both sides of the Ave. Top Showalter was her favorite nephew and gave him one of the lots in 1935.

Oscar Showalter was Manager of the Santa Rosa Shoe Factory, did not live a long life. He married Maggie Donner Ungewitter, sister to Dutch Ungewitter, dairyman in Sebastopol for many years. Uncle Jacob Donner of the Donner Party was her Uncle, and they named their eldest boy (1 of 2) Lloyd Donner Showalter. Lloyd left Santa Rosa, married, had children in Seattle and died there.

Donner Ungiwitter owned the bar and restaurant called "Don's) for many years.

The Dutch Ungewitters had three children, Dorothy, Don, and Marian & another boy.

So, Don was "kissin cousins" to the subject Ernest L. "Top" Showalter thru the union of Oscar Showalter and Maggie Ungewitter.

Marion Ungewitter retains a huge collection of Collectible Milk Bottles in Sebastopol. (?) uses a married name now which escapes me. Ask Janene Pete of 238 Florence Ave, Sebastopol if this is important.

Ruth married a Newman, relative to the Elphick family, orchardists on Elphick Road, Sebastopol, and moved to Richmond for the rest of her life. There are some Newmans in the old part of the Pleasant Hill Cemetery, and she may be there. Her husband was Charles "Charlie" Newman, and he had a brother "Johnny" who may also be there. She was very close to her sister in law of Sebastopol, Maggie Donner Ungewitter Showalter.

Now I Mention as an afterthought that Ruth Newman's son married an apple orchardist's daughter on Gold Ridge Road, Sebastopol, named Blanch Kelly and her sister Alice Kelly, married Don Dowd, well driller, contractor, Sebastopol, for many years, on Highway 12, Sebastopol.

Ernest Showalter (Not E L) moved to Bakersfield from Sebastopol for many years, but returned there to become a paint contractor where he died and is buried at the Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

Perry Lewis Showalter worked around Sebastopol Orchards and berry vineyards for most of his life, and may also be buried in Pleasant Hill Cemetery.

Ernest Lester, subject, attended Spring Hill Grammar School and Pleasant Hill Grammar School, graduating to Analy High School, where he attended by bus from the country. He met his future wife while in grammar School and they used to attend shows together, Being Starland owned by Huntlys and one on So Main st.

He married Dorethy Eldora Jones 6-7-1935 in Reno California when he was 20 and she was 19. She was working as part time office help for Livingston G. Scott, Attorney on South Main Street, (east side) near the Sebastopol Garage, and took shorthand, read and did typing. Mr Scott was almost blind, thus the reading aloud of his law books.

Her father was Reece Frederick Jones, and he brought his family to Sebastopol about 1927 from occupations as electrician, Elictrical Engineer for Wayerhauser Mill in Bonners Ferry Idaho. His wife was Ruby Pearl Jones and they had three daughters, Mable Pearl Jones (married Albert Charles Lunceford), Dorethy m Showalter and Rosalind (married Hickey and moved after his occupation for a short time at Hutton's Planing shop in Sebastopol, Cal on Sebastopol Ave was over.

Reece worked for Frank Butler, Spear Mfg as electrician +

Reece Frederick Jones, not finding his electrician work occupations, finally worked for Frank Fellers Garage, after moving to Sebastopol bout 1927, and continued to do so just to eat, until Frank actually could not pay wages. Two of Reece's brothers, John J (Johnny) Jones, and Elmo Jones and sometimes Hazen P Jones (brothers) worked there also. And Harry Hutton was also a auto mechanic also.

However, Johnny Jones, Elmo Jones, and Harry Hutton could best afford to pay off the employees and Frank Feller's debts so took over the business in it's entirety and started over as "Sebastopol Garage". A secretary* needed to be paid off, but she continued to work for the Garage for many years. One of the Hillards also became a mechanic there. The Jones-Hutton association remained a 24-hour service and business, including a AAA towing service for many years. Emma Broderson was the bookkeeper for many years until a Hillard took per place, and her son, Stan was also a mechanic there for a long time.

* Emma Broderson.

Many times I (Dorethy Jones) took meals, visited, and watched the mechanics use the 4 open cement pits to work under the cars. The gasoline pump was inside the building adjacent to the Burnett Street rear drive-in door, so entry usually was made by tow, or for gasoline thru the large front door on So Main Street, directly across from Benepe, which was next to J F Triggs Auto Parts. Trigg's two sons worked there named Arthur and Deb. Deb's wife was the one my dad always said he would rather have wait on him. She knew auto parts!

Carl Showalter and a brother, Horace Showalter, each bought 20 acres of orchard pieces that adjoined each other. The wooded land was on Pleasant Hill road and Watertrough Road became the property (when paid off) of Carl Showalter. Women's names were not affixed to property then.

The other piece was back of Carl's and on Watertrough Road.

The Twin Hills School site was to be purchased, probably from George Menini or Tony Bondi after being owned by Horace Showalter, Grant and Lucile Woodward, and Ernest and Dorethy Showalter.

The Cemetery is a free cemetery, part of which is in a corner of the two 20 acre pieces, and can only be added to, but not taken over. Carl Showalter and Mae Showalter are buried there and plots are saved within a cement curbing for their children and their spouses.

But the cemetery is another story which can be elaborated on when needed.

The old Pleasant Hill School sided on the cemetery, and a little further West faced the Pleasant Hill Home Culture Club, donated for use as such by Joe Valentine, just West and behind the Pleasant Hill School (later acquired by Darrell Hurst, orchards to house apple laborers in).

Carl Showalter bought his 20 (18 without cemetery) from Ann Morris (an Elphick). She had been married to Jim Morris, also an orchardist. He paid little down and cleared the land with horse and stump puller, often with the help of his son (riding the horse), and planted a new orchard on the cleared land.

To continue eating, he got a job on 180 more or less, acres of Orchards named Gold Ridge Orchards, and owned by Geo P McNear or Petaluma and Wm S "Bill" Hotle of Bodgea Highway, Hotle Orchards, and managed the orchards for many years, first with horses and wagons, then progressing to trucks, and finally in war time, he felt he could "go home". His job was very secure, he received house and utilities, with telephone, and $100 per month.

At one time he tried to give his property back during the early clearing stages, and Ann Elphick Morris said "What in the hell would I do with it Carl?".
He became a quality grower, grafted walnut scions all over the Sebastopol area, did

the same with apples, planted raised berries to sustain his orchard until they were bearing fruit commercially, and taught his son, the subject of this article, how to think, save, drive horses, trucks, and most of all how to be optimistic.

DRYERS AROUND SEBASTOPOL

Apple orchards were the mainstay of the community for many many years when my family first came to Sebastopol, California about 1927. My first school year was part of the 6th grade at the Sebastopol Grammar School, and that is where Richard Atherton and I first met. I was Dorethy E Jones, and we attended Analy Union High School together thru 1932. I graduated in 1933.

Ernest L (Top) Showalter attended Spring Hill School and Pleasant Hill Grammar Schools before graduating to Analy Union High School where he graduated in 1934 after loosing one year to an injury to his foot.

In the apple industry he assisted his dad morning and night and weekends. It was his job to rise early every morning and feed the huge work horses before their work days began, build the kitchen cook stove fire. During the lull before breakfast he did his school home work, and was a good student, excelling in the math subjects.

Apples were the big source of extra income. He picked up apples, learned to graft all kinds of trees, cut wood without any letup for the heating and cooking stoves and helped haul the apples to whatever outlet the economy dictated. Ground apples were picked up in gunny sacks. Those were apples fallen to the ground and were likely to be defective, or fall from natural causes. Gravenstein apples are prone to fall around 50% if left too long without partial harvest. Gravensteins are also a great source of food, and when dried are unparalleled for flavor, food value and storage quality. He was privileged to drive the horses and wagons to pick up boxes of fresh picked apples, destined for packing houses in town. Then he could drive the truck to town with fresh apple loads when permitted by his father and the usual truck driver, Ivan Roberts, a farmer from down the road, on Gold Ridge Road. Ivan's parents home was also on Gold Ridge Road. There are still Roberts families on that road. A Deb Triggs daughter married Don Roberts!

Top Showalter returned to Sebastopol during the war to operate the Jim Taniguchi Apple Dryer on Bodega Highway. The orchard and dryer were vacated when the two Taniguchi men were taken to Detention Camps, and the families were relocated to I believe Colorado. By some agreement of which I know no details, Wm S Hotle and Louie Hart (who was operating a packing house in town) took over the two orchards and the two dryers to operate for the duration. Wm S Hotel needed orchard supervision, and they needed the dryers to be operated on their behalf, so what better experience in apples than a young man, now 25, ready and able to accept their offer of orchard work and drying manager? This meant spraying and supervising pruning in off seasons and 10 hour days. The spray was lime-sulfer,

and the horses, men, and equipment were always yellow, and their eyes burned as they hand sprayed behind the horses. We had a white German Shepard dog that was constantly yellow during spray season.

The Taniguchis used Filipino workers in the apple dryers regularly but seasonally and furnished them living quarters behind the dry kilns. They were excellent people to work with, performed professionally, faithfully, and loved this new young man who had been hired to oversee the operation.

They even offered to lend him their auto when his failed. Three of them were notable in their particular attention to him - Felix Valdez, who went to work for Carl Showalter until his retirement - Al Unciano, who continued to work for him after the war at Pleasant Hill Coop Dryering until his retirement, and one young man who called himself "Little Al". The two Als served in the army and wrote to us from the service.

The nicest benefit of the association was that they taught all the fine points of drying apples to Top, from the pealing to coring, slicing, sulphering and packaging!

There were little apple dryers all over the country run by Filipinos, Portugese, Italians, Chinese individually.

Transportation probably required that the outlets be close, thus many were right in the orchards. I can call to mind, Regos, Hiuras, 2 Taniguchi, Alfred Halberg, Oscar Halberg, Gin Hop, Blackneys, Jack Starkey. There was one close to town near Healdsburg and E Hurlbut. Louis French had an abandoned dryer on his orchard. And brothers Cordoza each had an orchard and dryer. Later came the coop dryers. Rudy Oehlman and his wife Maude, ran a dryer in Green Valley, and there were others.

The town always smelled of hot apple juice because Speas was the ones
had dump trucks to go to the dryers and remove peelings from the peeling bins, rigged to dump into storage from above, and easily released into the dump trucks. The load went to the Speas Vinegar works to be made into vinegar and Apple Jack. The home office was in Kansas City, Mo. Many a high school student went to work at the Vinegar Works during summers. As the pulp splashed down onto big frames, each spread with gunny sack squares (huge blankets) stacked one on top of the other, pressure was applied from above and the juice squeezed out was saved, and the resulting dry pulp was shaken out by the two attendants. This went on day and night, and commanded about 10 cents more per hour than other summer work. It was a dirty stinky job?

The apples were individually placed to be peeled and cored. Then trimmed, spirals cut, placed on trays made slatted especially for dryers, about 4' x 4' and placed at spaces in a kiln, one above the other, maybe 10 high - maybe 3 or 4 stacks spaced

well enough to let the air for drying, and super to bleach get through properly. There were lots of apple stained hands, even some apple poison under nails of the women who did the trimming and placing on trays.

One modern (?) dryer I worked for downtown in Sebastopol was operated by Louis French, an apple-farm-prune dryer and experimenter. (He would go to the show and buy his own ticket, and she would go in same time and buy her own ticket). I was pretty young at that time.

Back to his dryer in town. It must have been an experiment. He had designed holes with rods and cutters to quarter apples on. The apples slid down nicely and with some pressure you could do 5 or 6 apples at one time.
The worst drawback was that the sulfer burning below keep the apples white almost suffocated the women workers coming up in their faces. I do not remember that job keeping us there long. We all coughed all the time and wiped our eyes and noses continuously.

After the war was over several men decided they would try cooperatively drying and selling apples. The war had taught them that they could well be giving their profits needlessly to the large and more advanced growers, with the most money to pay cash for their apples as delivered, whereas they might keep it for themselves and insure a regular income. Dried apples had been utilized hugely by the army purchases during the war. Gravensteins were the best all around apple except for its liability to drop. The trees are huge bearers. The favor is delightful. They have very large cores, and tend to brown if not treated properly when dry.

It truly is an art to dry apples and not make mush.

Such was the expertise of Clarence Pete who was THE dry man for Janes O'Connell when Top Showalter renewed his schoolday acquaintance for their mutual benefit. This Top Showalter and Clarence Pete worked together teaching each other what the other did not know for the next eleven years, to their great business and personal credit.

Many come to mind who should have mention - employees you still hear in the apple employment circles - but happy workers I remember are How Hop, Bill Doka, and J Russel Tighe, and a Secretary named Janene Pete.

When Top Showalter retired from the dryer to farm apples out on Pleasant Hill Road, after eleven successful years, he recommended Clarence Pete, and he stayed an additional 11 years as Manager before leaving for Manager-ship of Vacu Dry in Sebastopol and his retirement some years later.

While Top worked at Taniguchi Dryer, we lived in their suddenly vacated house, and there is another story. The house is across from the Wilson orchards, run by

Darryl and J Earle Wilson for their widowed mother. The three Wilsons are deceased.

A story on Packinghouses should be told also:

We are meeting on 5-5-2002 exactly where Richard and Max Bridgeford worked, and Dorethy E Jones worked in Sebastopol Union Packinghouse # 2, which was on a railroad spur. Apples went out of town exclusively by box car in wooden boxes with labels pasted on the ends by employees, according to orders.

Exhausted packers wrapped in paper individually and placed in a box required by the apple size. Smaller apples required more to the box, thus heavier box. Big apples packed faster, more air, fewer apples, less weight. Since packers were paid by the box, they were required to rotate to head packer each hour to be fair.

The Betz Packing Co had contracts with the packing houses to bring in their packers each year (fruit tramps), and they lived all over, many with local families, and were truly great renters, not what we call "fruit tramps" now. Sebastopol benefited by it all.

Fresh apple packers were all in town or on the railroad. There were five SAGU (Sebastopol Apple Growers Union) houses, #1 and #2 were in town - there was one near at Forestville, Molino, and near Cunningham (?).

In town also was Adams, Russell Kelly, Hotle & Hart, Furusho, J Russell Taylor.

We were 14 years old when my sister, Mable Jones (Lunceford) started to work in the packing house with our mother, and bought all of our own school clothing from that time on.

In 1942, I Dorethy E Jones Showalter had been picking apples, peeling apples and picking cherries for G Stanley Ross, our partner and neighbor (to save the farmers crop s during the war) when I was approached by Arthur Janssen, Pro-Assistant Cashier of the Bank of America in Sebastopol, to go to work for the bank. I had had quite a bit of experience with shorthand, typing, credit bureau, l attorney and had worked in the Chamber of Commerce in North Hollywood, Calif. (Barney Oldfield was the Mayor). Men were leaving the banks which were strictly mail employers to that time. So, I went very temporarily, and stayed 11 years, until 1953 when we bought the old Ernie Sharp home, house, and orchard with wells and tank house and a huge barn (all still there). Ernie Sharp build the 10 room, 3 bath home in 1918 at 1411 Pleasant Hill Road, Sebastopol, California, always well preserved. The home and orchards was sold by Showalters to Osters of the bay area in 1973.

The first owners were the builders Sharp, no children, then Louis C Stewart of San Francisco, no children, then Ernest Top Showalter, and Dot Showalter, no children.

All names started with "S". Some coincidence!
Gus Walker, Grandfather to Top Showalter, carried hod for the house, and there is a record of 28 camellias being planted, and the building took 8 kegs of nails.

When transportation became feasible and possible to haul apples by truck, and when it appeared the economy was in favor of the independent operators there was a move toward forming cooperative dehydrators. The plants were built in Green Valley, Sebastopol, named Pleasant Hill Dryer, possibly because it was closer to the Pleasant Hill group who started it, and Molino (Sebastopol Apple Growers Union) and may still be the largest in the area. Pleasant Hill Dryer was purchased by Barlow Company, from the Barlow Brothers efforts, and now operated by Tom Barlow on Sebastopol Avenue.

Sebastopol Coop Canners, then the

Newcomers moved into the area, knew little about apples, and the orchards are very slowly deteriorating and being pulled out in this year of 2002. Orchards are being sold for housing at very high prices, and many put into grapes.

At one time before 1920 grapes were pulled and planted to apples, and now that process is reversed.

marketing

A Gravenstein Apple Order was formed and promoted at one time by Harold Hotle, Bank of Sonoma President, but the packers were not very cooperative, always trying to ship apples first, and while too green, so it failed. That was sometime in the 1950s.

A California Processing Apple Growers Association was formed in 1960, and a great deal of work went into gathering names and members all over the state. Ernest L. Showalter was the first President, but farmers, being too independent did not support it for more than 3 or 4 years.

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